

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3574

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

AT SHREVEPORT, LA., ON

MAY 14, 1954

SUMMARY

Date: May 14, 1954

Railroad: Illinois Central

Location: Shreveport, La.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Transfer movement : Bus

Engine number: St. L.S.W. 352 :

Consist: Locomotive in tow, :
18 cars

Estimated speeds: 6-15 m. p. h. : 10-17 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and operating
rules; yard limits

Tracks: Double; tangent; 0.90 percent
ascending grade westward

Highway: Tangent; crosses tracks at angle of
76°30'; 2.00 percent ascending grade
northward

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:50 p. m.

Casualties: 6 injured

Cause: Bus occupying rail-highway grade
crossing immediately in front of
approaching transfer movement

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IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY

July 1, 1954

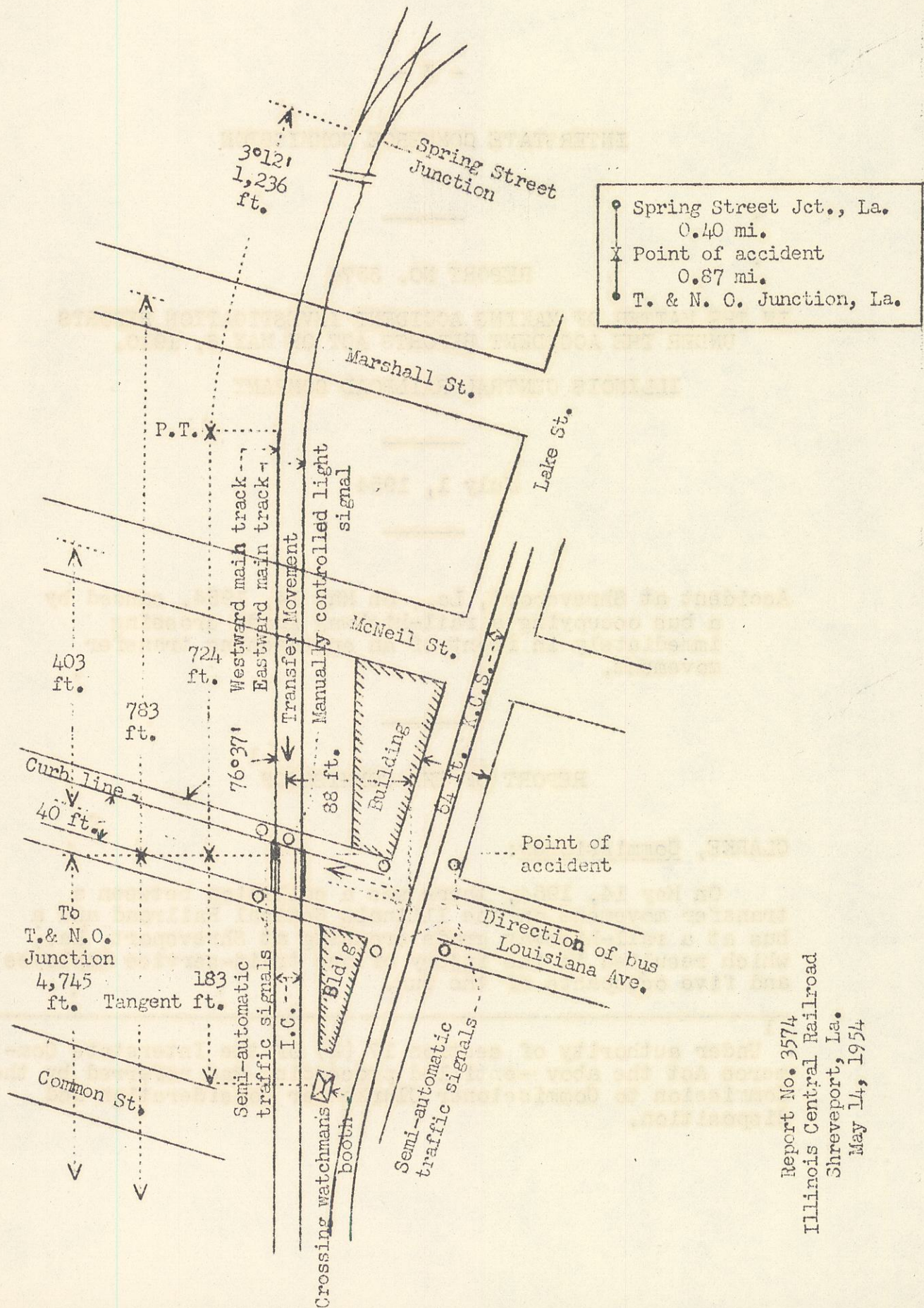
Accident at Shreveport, La., on May 14, 1954, caused by
a bus occupying a rail-highway grade crossing
immediately in front of an approaching transfer
movement.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On May 14, 1954, there was a collision between a
transfer movement on the Illinois Central Railroad and a
bus at a rail-highway grade crossing at Shreveport, La.,
which resulted in the injury of one train-service employee
and five occupants of the bus.

¹ Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Com-
merce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the
Commission to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and
disposition.



Report No. 3574
 Illinois Central Railroad
 Shreveport, La.
 May 14, 1954

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Vicksburg Division extending between Spring Street Junction and T. & N.O. Junction, 1.27 miles. Both of these points are located within the corporate limits of Shreveport, La. This is a double-track line, over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by timetable and operating rules. There is no block system in use. Trains and engines of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway regularly are operated over this portion of the Illinois Central Railroad. The accident occurred within yard limits, on the westward main track, at a point 1,960 feet west of Spring Street Junction, where the railroad is crossed at grade by Louisiana Avenue. From the east on the railroad there are, in succession, a 3°12' curve to the left 1,236 feet in length and a tangent 724 feet to the point of accident and a considerable distance westward. The grade for west-bound movements averages 0.90 percent ascending throughout a distance of 1,000 feet immediately east of the crossing. Louisiana Avenue intersects the railroad at an angle of 76°37'. This avenue is 40 feet wide between curbs and is surfaced with bituminous material. It is tangent for a considerable distance on each side of the crossing. The grade for north-bound vehicles averages 2.00 percent ascending a distance of 150 feet immediately south of the crossing and is practically level over the crossing. The crossing is approximately 65 feet wide. A 4-inch by 10-inch timber is secured to the ties on each side of each rail, and the remaining area of the crossing is surfaced with bituminous material to the approximate level of the tops of the rails. The main tracks are laid on 14.1-foot centers at this point.

In this vicinity McNeill Street parallels Louisiana Avenue on the east and intersects the Illinois Central tracks at a point 403 feet east of the center-line of the crossing at Louisiana Avenue. Lake Street extends at right angles to Louisiana Avenue and intersects Louisiana Avenue south of the Illinois Central crossing. The center-line of Lake Street is 88 feet distant from the center-line of the crossing. Lake Street is 64 feet in width. A double-track line of the Kansas City Southern Railway extends along the center of Lake Street at grade.

Railroad-crossing advance-warning signs are not provided for north-bound traffic on Louisiana Avenue in approach to the crossing of either the Kansas City Southern line or the Illinois Central line.

Between the hours of 6 a. m. and 10 p. m. train and engine movements on the Illinois Central line over the crossing at Louisiana Avenue are governed by a manually controlled light signal. The signal consists of two hooded light units mounted back-to-back and suspended from a span-wire 23 feet above the level of the tops of the rails and between the tracks near the east side of the crossing. Normally this signal is dark, but when actuated for a movement on the railroad it is illuminated and displays a green aspect toward a train or engine approaching from either direction. There are no track circuits in this territory, and this signal, together with other similar signals, is controlled from an elevated crossing-watchman's booth located south of the tracks and 178 feet west of Louisiana Avenue. This signal operates in conjunction with semi-automatic traffic signals governing the movements of vehicular traffic at the intersection of Louisiana Avenue and Lake Street and over the railroad crossing. Semi-automatic traffic signals of the conventional three-indication double-head type are located at each corner of the intersection of Louisiana Avenue and Lake Street. The signals which govern north-bound vehicles are located in the northeast and northwest corners of the intersection. Signals governing south-bound vehicles are located at this intersection and also immediately north of the railroad crossing. Operation of a push button in the watchman's booth illuminates the signal governing railroad movements and causes the traffic signals to display red aspects to north-bound and south-bound traffic on Louisiana Avenue and green aspects to traffic on Lake Street. The railroad signal is extinguished and the traffic signals restored to automatic operation by operation of a release button in the watchman's booth. When the signal governing railroad movements is not actuated, the traffic signals alternately indicate Stop and Proceed on each of the intersecting streets during each cycle of operation.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

30. * * * the engine bell must be rung * * * while approaching and passing public crossings at grade * * *

General Order No. 1 of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway reads in part as follows:

7.11 The following instructions will govern in the movement of trains, engines or cars over the following street crossings at Shreveport: * * * Louisiana Avenue.

* * *

The towerman located at Louisiana Avenue is assigned 6:00 a. m. to 10:00 p. m. daily, and when this man is on duty he controls the traffic signals, and in addition the overhead light in the middle of the street only has a green aspect. During the hours that man is on duty, a train, engine or switch move will not move over Louisiana Avenue until overhead light shows a green or proceed aspect. * * * During the period that the towerman is not on duty a flagman must precede each movement and flag vehicular traffic on this crossing.

* * *

Shreveport Ordinance No. 13 of 1942 reads in part as follows:

* * *

* * * That in order to provide for the safety of the citizens it is hereby required that all railway companies operating trains, engines or cars across the surface grade street crossings hereinafter named shall erect, maintain and operate suitable and adequate traffic safety lights by which trains may be operated across such crossings without having to come to a stop and that it shall be required that all pedestrians and drivers of all vehicles shall come to a stop and observe such lights, and the only crossing to be made of said streets at the intersections of railroads is to be made when the green light is shown, street traffic coming to a full stop when the red light is shown.

* * * the said safety traffic lights are required to be installed * * * at the intersection of Louisiana Street and Lake Street, approaching said railroad track, and at the intersection of Louisiana Street and the tracks of the Illinois Central Railway Company * * *

An ordinance adopted July 11, 1889, reads in part as follows:

* * * That it shall be unlawful to blow or sound locomotive whistles within the corporate limits of this city.

The maximum authorized speed for all trains is 25 miles per hour in the vicinity of the point of accident. It is restricted by local ordinance to 20 miles per hour within the city limits.

Description of Accident

A west-bound St. Louis Southwestern transfer movement, which was assembled in the St. Louis Southwestern Railway yard at Shreveport, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 352, one locomotive in tow, and 18 freight cars, in the order named. Both locomotives were headed westward. This movement departed from the St.L.S.W. yard about 9:40 p. m., entered the westward main track of the Illinois Central line at Spring Street Jct., and while moving at an estimated speed of 6 to 15 miles per hour it struck a bus at the rail-highway grade crossing at Louisiana Avenue.

The bus involved was owned and operated by the driver, who held Louisiana chauffeur's license No. 21391. The bus was operated as a gratuitous service to members of a church organization. The chassis of the bus is a 1946 model Studebaker. It is powered by a six-cylinder gasoline engine and is equipped with a transmission having four forward speeds. It is provided with dual wheels at the rear. The wheelbase is 18 feet 4 inches. The body was built by the Superior Body Company and is of all-steel construction. It is 22 feet 4 inches in length and has seating capacity for 54 passengers. The door is located on the right-hand side of the body opposite the driver's seat, and there is an emergency door at the rear. The windows are provided with safety plate glass. The overall length of the bus is 27 feet 11 inches. It bears Louisiana license No. 250-270. At the time the accident occurred the bus was occupied by the driver, one other adult, and eight children. This bus was moving northward on Louisiana Avenue at an estimated speed of 10 to 17 miles per hour when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by the transfer movement.

The transfer movement stopped with the front end of the locomotive 150 feet west of the point of collision. No equipment of the movement was derailed. The front end of the locomotive was slightly damaged. The bus was struck on the right side immediately in front of the rear wheel. It was moved westward in front of the transfer movement and stopped upright and headed toward the east, on the north side of and parallel to the westward main track. The front end was approximately 85 feet west of the point of collision.

The bus was considerably damaged.

One yard brakeman was injured.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:50 p. m.

No record of the average daily movement over the crossing on the railroad during the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident was available. During the 24-hour period beginning at 12:01 a. m., May 24, 1954, 11 trains and 43 transfer movements passed over the crossing. During the same period, 6,222 automobiles, 162 buses, 1,019 motor-trucks, and 78 other vehicles passed over this crossing.

Discussion

As the transfer movement was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective positions in the control compartment of the locomotive, the yard conductor was seated behind the fireman, one yard brakeman was on the steps at the front end of the locomotive, and the other yard brakeman was seated in the cab of the locomotive which was in tow. The brakes had been tested before departure from the St. L.S.W. yard and had functioned properly when used en route. The headlight was lighted. The locomotive bell was ringing. The fireman said that as the locomotive was approaching McNeill Street he observed two north-bound automobiles pass over the crossing at Louisiana Avenue. As the locomotive crossed McNeill Street the members of the crew observed that the signal at Louisiana Avenue indicated Proceed for movements on the railroad. The engineer said he observed that the traffic signals for south-bound traffic, which were visible to him, displayed red aspects for highway traffic at that crossing. The yard brakeman at the front of the locomotive estimated that the locomotive approached the crossing at a speed of about 15 miles per hour. The other members of the crew thought the speed was between 6 and 8 miles per hour. From a locomotive approaching from the east, the view of traffic approaching the crossing from the south is restricted by a building located in the southeast angle of the intersection and approximately 50 feet south of the westward track. The engineer's view of approaching north-bound traffic was further restricted by the hood structure of the locomotive. The fireman and the members of the train crew on the locomotive said that when the bus passed the corner of the building and became visible to them they thought it would stop short of the crossing, but almost immediately afterward

they realized that it would not stop. They called a warning to the engineer, and the engineer made an emergency application of the brakes. At approximately the same time, the engineer saw the bus at a distance which he thought was from 10 to 20 feet in front of the locomotive. The collision occurred before the speed of the movement was appreciably reduced. According to the tape of the speed recording device, the speed was less than 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred. However, the distance between the point of accident and the point where the locomotive stopped warrants the conclusion that the rate of speed was higher than indicated. The engineer said he could not estimate the speed of the bus. The other employees on the locomotive estimated the speed of the bus at from 10 to 17 miles per hour. The yard brakeman who was on the front of the locomotive was injured when he alighted immediately before the collision occurred.

When the accident occurred the bus was returning to Shreveport from Bossier City, La., about 1.3 miles east of Shreveport. Members of a church organization were being returned to their homes by the owner-driver of the bus, who regularly performed this service without remuneration. In a statement which the driver of the bus submitted, through his attorney, he said that he stopped the bus at the southeast corner of the intersection of Louisiana Avenue and Lake Street in compliance with the stop indication of the traffic signals. When the aspects of the signals changed from red to green he proceeded northward, crossed the tracks of the Kansas City Southern line, and started across the tracks of the Illinois Central line. He said he did not see or hear the approaching train until one of the passengers called a warning, and he then attempted to increase the speed. The collision occurred immediately afterward. A police officer who arrived at the scene soon after the accident occurred and questioned the driver in connection with the accident said the driver gave him the additional information that the aspects of the traffic signals at the intersection of Louisiana Avenue and Lake Street changed from green to red after the bus had entered the intersection.

The crossing watchman on duty in the watchman's booth at the time of the accident said that he actuated the signal at Louisiana Avenue for the west-bound transfer movement when the locomotive was approaching McNeil Street. He observed that the signal over the railroad indicated Proceed

and that a traffic signal which was visible on Louisiana Avenue indicated Stop for conflicting vehicular traffic. He said that about 30 seconds after he actuated the signal he observed the bus proceed northward across the intersection of Lake Street and Louisiana Avenue and enter the crossing where the accident occurred.

A police officer who was a witness to the accident said that he was standing on the east side of Louisiana Avenue near the traffic signal for north-bound vehicles. He said that the traffic signals at the intersection of Lake Street and Louisiana Avenue had been displayed red aspects for north-bound and south-bound traffic on Louisiana Avenue for a period of approximately 30 seconds before the bus proceeded northward across the intersection. The headlights of the bus were lighted. The police officer estimated that the bus was moving at a speed of about 12 miles per hour as it passed the traffic signal, which indicated Stop. He said he called a warning but apparently the driver did not hear him. The locomotive of the transfer movement was then closely approaching the crossing. The police officer said that the bus continued to move northward without any variation in speed until the collision occurred.

Cause

This accident was caused by a bus occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching transfer movement.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this first day of July, 1954.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,
Secretary.

